

Nominating Committees' Role as Elders—Naming and Nurturing Gifts

Joan Liversidge, Facilitator

Notes from Connecting Local Meetings (CLM) Offering at Annual Session 2019

Participants: Martha Mason Semmes, Carolyn Unger, Rich Weidner (all from Goose Creek), Jacqueline Stillwell (NEYM), Ken Stockbridge (Patapsco), Arthur Boyd (Stoney Run), Betsy Tobin (Frederick), Barbara Thomas (Annapolis)

In the first hour following worship and introductions, Joan gave us a handout with one-paragraph descriptions of (i) Naming Spiritual Gifts, (ii) Nurturing Spiritual Gifts, and (iii) Functions of Eldering. In triads, we reviewed each description and shared on four prompts:

- An experience of (naming and/or nurturing, or eldering) that was life giving is ... (If you haven't had this experience, imagine thoughts about if you had...)
- When you think about (naming and/or nurturing, or eldering), what fears arise?
- When you think about (naming and/or nurturing, or eldering), what hopes arise?
- Do you have any questions about (naming and/or nurturing, or eldering)?

In the second hour, as a full group, we addressed: "What came up for you re struggles? What if we shifted from filling slots to naming, nurturing and eldering?" Some of our comments are below:

At Patapsco, the Nominating Committee calls each potential nominee to ask:

- (i) How is your life in the meeting supporting your spiritual journey?
- (ii) What do you see as your leadings and gifts (in relation to the needs of the meeting)? (Words in the parentheses are unspoken initially.)

Asking in this way creates a culture change.

It is important to move leadership from elders to younger Friends, bridging the generation gap and getting young Friends on committees. But, don't do it as a token. Get to know your YAFs. Ask often: "How is your life going? What is growing in you?"

We need to get away from the certain individuals being elders to all functioning as elders as Way opens. Have each committee develop a clerking transition plan. For example, 30% of committee could be new each time. Grow leadership succession. Those rotating off could become the "nominating committee" for the next clerk.

Emily Provence exercise re "Where my gifts meet the world's or community's needs." Break down assumptions of role we are about to fill. Hold the roles lightly and with fluidity.

Consider laying down committees. If no one wants to keep nursery, hire someone for a year who is skilled. Let committees rest or merge functions if no leading arises. Be

task oriented instead of committee oriented. Encourage working groups to develop. Their numbers are currently exploding at BYM.

Instead of Committees and Slots, think of Tasks and Gifts. Deepen within your Nominating Committee itself. Focus on people, not committees.

Use Strawberry Creek method: name the positive gifts instead of why someone would not be good for a position.

Nurturing Standing Committees: Meet with each committee (clerks and members). Learn what works well and what is difficult. Have a Spiritual State of the Committee sharing time.

Handouts: (i) Betsy Meyer's Catalogue of Spiritual Gifts (with Queries)
(ii) Eldering Gifts and (iii) Eldering Tasks

Connecting Local Meetings Workshop

Thursday, August 1, 2-4 pm

LMT: Nominating Committees' role as elders, naming and nurturing gifts. Let's bring sensitivity and openness to a deeper, broader, and newer understanding of this role. Quakers have some habits of the heart and thinking about nominating that would be good to shake loose and open up some to new light and energy. **Joan Liversidge, Sandy Spring MM**

Queries for each topic

An experience of (naming and/or nurturing spiritual gifts, eldering) that was life giving is

If you haven't had this experience, imagine thoughts about if you had

When you think about (naming, nurturing, eldering), what fears arise?

When you think about (naming, nurturing, eldering), what hopes arise?

Are there any questions about (naming, nurturing, eldering)?

Naming Spiritual Gifts

The acknowledgement and verbalization of some sense that an individual may be stewarding a gift of the spirit. This is a close parallel to the moment when a faithful clerk identifies the sense of the meeting using words that seem just right even though they are not quite what anyone had said previously. This might happen as a formal invitation to serve the meeting by using their gift in some official capacity (often called nominating) or it might be offering an observation of the gift over a cup of tea. Also, needing to have a slot filled on a committee and feeling like it needs to be filled does not force a gift to emerge. While a person may rejoice in having someone acknowledge something that is coming to life in them others may recoil; the response is not a sure indicator of the trueness of the naming. In either case, there is responsibility in naming and follow-up is required. Also of note: having the ability to see and sense the emergence of gifts is itself a gift.

Nurturing Spiritual Gifts

Consistent care and concern not only for the person stewarding gifts of the spirit, but for the community in which that person is serving. Just as tending to a plant often means changing the conditions of its soil, committed nurture will not focus entirely on an individual, but on the ground in which that person is rooted, the body of their meeting. This is the word of ongoing relationship and caring, noticing and nudging. It might often include questioning, supporting, and sometimes invitations for the person who is stewarding the gift of the spirit to stretch into new roles. Care should be taken that the person being nurtured does not come into conflict or tension with their meeting as they shift their life to more fully allow themselves to be guided by the right

use of the gift. Should conflict or tension occur, nurturing is also often being a liaison or bridge between the person being nurtured and their meeting. While there will be pieces of information that are personal and should remain confidential, it is also the case that knowledge of the person's gifts should be shared with the meeting. Also of note: having the ability to nurture and care for people is itself a gift.

Function of Elders

Eldering is not so much something we do as it is something we are. The eldering function in depth requires, minimally, a deep and intimate exchange that includes finding out what the situation is like for the person being eldered, accepting and understanding that person's condition, and having time for exploratory questions and comments, as well as presenting a perspective that reflects a seasoned concern of the meeting community. Spirit-led eldering is offering spiritual leadership, which is to support and encourage the life of the Spirit in an individual or group, or to raise questions and explore, with another person or group, ways in which they may be more faithful to the Spirit, or it is simply being prayerfully present. (Margery Mears Larrabee)

Resources

Adapted from **Naming, Nurturing, Pruning, and the Exercise of Gifts** Workshop presented at Intermountain Yearly Meeting, 2016 by Callid Keefe-Perry and Kristina Keefe-Perry of New England Yearly Meeting and Elaine Emily of Pacific Yearly Meeting

Spirit-Led Eldering, Integral to our Faith and Practice, Margery Mears Larrabee, Pendle Hill Pamphlet #392, Wallingford, PA. Email: publications @pendlehill.org (p. 26 on nominating committee)

Living in the Dashes – Ministry and Meetings, plenary address by Callid Keefe-Perry, presented to Intermountain Yearly Meeting, June, 2016
www.westernfriend.org/media/living-dashes-ministry-and-meetings.

Spiritual Nurture Ministry Among Friends, Sandra Cronk, 2015, and **The Exercise of Spiritual Authority within the Meeting**, Lloyd Lee Wilson, 2014, School of the Spirit Ministry
www.schoolofthespirit.org 919-929-2339

1 Corinthians 12: 4 – 7 Now there are varieties of gifts, but the same Spirit; and there are varieties of services, but the same God; and there are varieties of activities, but it is the same God who activates all of them in everyone. To each is given the manifestation of the Spirit for the common good.

LOVE

ELDERING GIFTS

LOVE

concern and feeling for quality of **WORSHIP**

focused **ATTENTION**

willingness to **PRAY**
deep, nonjudgmental **LISTENING**

OPEN HEART

PRAYERFUL use of *intuitions*

OPEN MIND

PATIENCE

QUESTIONS before opinions

PASSION

TRUST of the *Spirit's* leadings

God's

GROUNDENESS

PRESENCE

DISCERNMENT

EMBODY TRADITION of the community

Value **SPIRITUAL HOSPITALITY**

for and with others

responsive to **THAT OF GOD**

in the **OTHER**

LOVE ELDERING TASKS LOVE

community

NURTURE

spiritual life of individuals

PAY ATTENTION

meeting for worship

TEACHING

ministry

HOLD BODY
IN PRAYER

oversight of
vocal ministry

ACCOUNTABILITY

*begins with storytelling:
what do I think I'm doing?*

other gifts
(after identifying and
drawing them out)

*Elders **listen** to the answer to this question*

BE a channel,
a reflector,
a deflector

ADVOCATE

*for those who are
unheard or invisible*

TEST LEADINGS

affirm **FAITHFULNESS**

LISTEN